

Linda Clair
Five-day Meditation Retreat
Kallara Conference Centre, Australia – June 2019
Transcription from Audio Recordings

File 1d – Saturday afternoon discussion session

Question: I'd like to ask for some guidance. I've practiced traditional Vipassana meditation and I understand the instructions to focus on the rise and fall of the chest, but I'm also feeling quite anxious and I'm just wondering if you could give me some more guidance? About this transition and process.

Linda: So you're feeling anxious? (Yes.) You're not the only one. Probably a few people are.

So it's not about focusing on anything, and not up here (pointing to chest) either. It's more down in your belly, coming back to your belly and using that as, well, I'd call it your home base. So you keep coming back to that. It's a very tangible place to feel the breath in the body. But most people actually tend to breathe up here. It feels very foreign to them going down and breathing into the belly. So it does take practice. And you will feel anxious about it at times because there's a lot of anxiety down there. So you won't want to go down there at times. You'll have to be really firm about it and come down. I thought in Vipassana it was breathing down here too, isn't it?

Question: It is. It starts with the nose...

Linda: If you want to do that usual thing, do that, but bring it back down here (the belly). So you'll feel other sensations in your body and feel them; don't push them away and feel that you just have to focus exclusively on the breath down here. But use it as your anchor. It's not to get away from anything, to exclude anything. It's just to try to keep you as stable as possible in your body.

That's what the aim of it is. That's what sitting is all about – being as stable and grounded as possible so you can cope with the things I was talking about: the breakdown of everything you know, the breakdown of everything you thought was real. You need that stability and the body provides you with that stability while that is happening, otherwise you can tend to just float away, become confused.

But you are going to feel anxious, so don't feel you shouldn't feel anxious, because at times of course, you will. The anxiety of letting go of all these things that we feel very secure with – the known – and going into this unknown territory. The anxiety eventually changes into, what could I say, excitement, in a way, of going into this unknown territory. But, again and again that anxiety will come up. So just sit with it, feel it. If you feel it as a sensation in your belly, great. Feel it. If you feel it in your body as tightening, just sit there and feel it.

Don't feel that you shouldn't be feeling it, because you are. So don't try and push it away, don't encourage it. Just try and feel it in as neutral a way as possible. But it's quite a normal thing to feel.

So, just feel it. We're scared of feeling anxiety. We think that's wrong, it shouldn't be there. But doing this, when you look at it logically, of course you're going to feel anxious at times about it.

So yes, keep it simple. Keep it body-based, as body-based as possible.

Linda: I'm not having interviews this retreat. There are too many people again. I felt last retreat it was more effective not having the interviews because it forced people to say stuff during the discussion periods that they might not have felt comfortable saying before. So it's like it's forcing you to be a bit more open. If you've got questions or comments, do it now. If you haven't, that's fine.

How're you D.?

Question: Good and also, now when I come to sit there's more fear than ever actually. It's not all fear. It was good to see you because I immediately felt that intimacy. I forgot about that while I hadn't been seeing you.

Linda: Well it's one of the main reasons that I'm here, and that you're here – to face your fear – but to use me as an anchor and reassurance.

Question: I've been feeling quite separate from everything, or distant from everything, or maybe even stepped back from everything in my personal life, in my relationship, and at work. I feel I'm navigating a different kind of landscape. Doesn't feel like a cold step back but..

Linda: Detached? (Yes.) It's a stage, and it's a stage that everyone goes through at some time. And it's really strange because it feels like the opposite to what you want is happening. But it's just that you are starting to detach from attachment, so the relationships will change. It won't always be like this; it will change. You've just got to trust that and trust that this is a normal part of it. What else can I say about it – try not to be disturbed about it. Just let it happen.

Anything based on attachment starts to fall away. Anything that you used as a crutch to hold onto falls away. Eventually all you've got is yourself, you, your body. You realise, "Okay, this is all about me. I can't use anything else." It becomes impossible to use anything else as a distraction from what's happening in you. And that's one of the reasons for the detachment, to really force you to look as deeply as possible, at you.

Question: There's a strong feeling of there being very little room to move.

Linda: Like you can't go forwards, you can't go back. You're stuck here. (Yes, it's very strong.) That's the truth – you can't go forwards, you can't go back. But there's still this resistance to being here. It doesn't feel quite right, it feels uncomfortable. Just stay with that discomfort. Stay as grounded as you can. You're not going anywhere in this. Like I said, you're not going to feel better, so get used to it. Just here – there's nowhere else to go. So everything you've said is actually a good sign.

Question: It's wonderful to be here and I must admit I feel much lighter, because coming here I felt that I was falling apart, physically. Every ache and pain was exaggerated and intensified in different parts of my body. My nervous system was shattering somehow. It was a strange feeling really – I

know it sounds a bit dramatic – but like I’m dying. It was quite scary too. But arriving here, something shifted around all that pain – not feeling so frightened of it somehow, or relieved to be somewhere – well, to be here.

Linda: Where you want to be. (Yes.) There will often be that resistance, particularly before a retreat. I’ve often said that’s why we have the cancellation policy, because people often – I mean they do genuinely feel that – but use it as a reason to not turn up. Of course sometimes people are genuinely sick, but it can often be like that.

You can still feel that unsettledness too, during the first twenty-four hours during a retreat. It often takes that time to settle in. But just trust that you’re doing the right thing being here. Put yourself in my hands – I’ll look after you, you’ll be ok.

Question: It was almost immediate. Arriving just felt like this field of, “I can be with all these things without feeling completely lost in,” whether or not I knew what was going on.

Linda: Well you don’t know what’s going on, but I do. So just leave that part to me. Of course you have to work, and work with it, but just trust me. That makes it, not easier, but it takes away that doubt, and that ego thing too of trying to figure out what’s going on, “Oh, I know better,” or, “I can do this or that.” Just put yourself in my hands, and it’ll be ok.

Question: Thanks. I will. It’s like a chaos in the body, a real chaos.

Linda: It is. Every cell is protesting and resisting, and you feel every bit of resistance. And you’ll feel it physically.

Question: It’s like a sediment in parts of my body that’s just there, like a resistance.

Linda: And this is hard on your body. It is, there’s no doubt about it. I spend most of my time in between retreats just keeping my body together for the next one, just having a rest, recovering, so I can go in fresh to the next one. It’s only three weeks since I got back – it feels like months! It feels like another lifetime!

Question: It does feel exciting as well.

Linda: It is. It’s the most exciting thing you can do. It’s not fixed. It’s not this fixed state. And it’s not bliss you’re after. You think it’s bliss you’re after, but you know, it’s easy to feel bliss once you’re in this state. It’s nice for a while, and then you want a challenge. It’s a challenge that you want to go even more deeply into this. So the bliss is just by the way, it comes and goes. But when you’re in a lot of pain all you want is relief from it, and bliss is often a reaction to lack of emotional pain, suffering.

Question: It feels sort of like very much in the unknown in that way.

Linda: And it’s amazing! Who wants to go through their life knowing what’s going to happen – how boring! And that’s what thinking is all about, going, “I know what’s going to happen. I know how I’m going to feel. I know this, I know that, I know who I am,” when really you’ve got no idea what’s going

to happen. You've got no idea how you're going to behave or respond or whatever. But you feel completely secure in that – it's incredible.

It's just incredibly exciting – anything can happen and there's not this resistance to it. Well, occasionally there is. I've had a little bit of resistance this week, just this physical thing I've had. But it's like everything just takes you even more deeply into this. So if there is a slight bit of resistance then you see it as just this residual past that might be there, and a chance to free yourself from that even a bit more. And it is, it's exciting, it's incredibly exciting.

Question: It feels safe for it to be exciting here.

Linda: It is, and that's why I say to people don't meditate too much by yourself, like for long, long periods, because you haven't got that extra groundedness and it's not always completely safe – sometimes it is, sometimes not, it depends. But here, you're safe. So explore – don't be scared to explore and just experiment and go as deeply as you can into this. You're not happy with the person you are and that's why you're here – if you were, you wouldn't be here – or you're not satisfied.

Question: It's a funny thing that longing to be free – a sort of conundrum. The mind can't get a hold of what that means because it thinks it's its own longing somehow, or that the longing is its own, but it's not really.

Linda: It thinks everything – it thinks it owns you, and most people allow it to do that. But this is breaking free from there.

Question: I feel like I've got a fair amount of tension around my throat. I don't think it's just the coughing. I don't feel that I heat up anymore when I sit, even at home and here. I was wanting to ask if it's just another expression of resistance. At one point in the sit I felt like a scarf was wrapped around my neck. I didn't feel like coughing, it just feels like a different physical thing happening.

Linda: You will get a lot of tension there – it's quite normal to feel that, and the swallowing. A lot of people get that almost constant swallowing at times. It's just fear and there's a lot of fear around this area. I think part of it is deep seated, essentially, fear of death. But there's also a lot of fear that people have about expressing themselves and being real, and saying what they feel rather than what they think they should say or what they think other people want them to say. So yes, it's quite common to feel that tightness and that tension there. Just sit with it. Don't try and get rid of it. It will be uncomfortable, but just be reassured it's quite normal in this.

Question: It really did touch me very deeply in the beginning when you said, "Just use this time here to drop every social mask." I just felt like so in-the-right-place, finally.

Linda: Yes, you don't have to be anyone. You don't have to be nice. That doesn't mean you're not nice, but you don't have to do anything. You don't have to be here. You're here because you want to be here, something has brought you here. So it just gives you that freedom to not to have to be this person for at least a few days.